Securing the Ports

Partnerships are vital to Maritime Domain Awareness.

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Gone are the days of high-overhead warehousing and stocks of goods and supplies. Modern commerce necessarily relies on a more efficient and consumer-responsive "just-in-time" delivery system. Ships are the 21st century's floating warehouses and our ports the large distribution centers. More than 95 percent of all our goods are moved through our ports and waterways, with containers representing the major intermodal delivery system. In addition, many citizens flock to the water for recreation—documented in part by the ever-increasing number and size of behemoth, state-of-the-industry cruise ships.

In this commercial environment, a port closure in the event of a marine transportation security incident would have immediate and substantial local and regional economic consequences. Depending on the specific port, the cargoes involved, or the magnitude of the threat, an incident in a single port could become an "incident of national significance," requiring a coordinated federal, state, and local response.

An incident of this magnitude could have national economic consequences as well, as demonstrated after Hurricane Katrina, when the closing of the Port of New Orleans interrupted a significant gas supply line. Closing a second or third port, even for a short period, could cripple our economy, costing billions of dollars in lost trade and revenues.

**Maritime Domain Awareness is
the First Step to More Secure Ports**

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is about information gathering and sharing and lies at the center of homeland security, homeland defense, economic, and environmental interests. The objective is to ensure maritime safety and security and to protect commercial interests, the environment, and the economy. By integrating and correlating information from all maritime interests into a common operating picture, and then disseminating this information to decision makers, MDA makes it easier to determine the most appropriate course of action in any given situation.

MDA is not new. The United States has been pursuing and relying on continual improvements to maritime awareness since the earliest days of maritime trade. But for most effective awareness at the local level, coordination with state and local government and private sector entities becomes critical. Collaboration and information sharing with these strategic partners is a key element in providing layered safety and security.

The Coast Guard relies on state, local, and private sector experts to identify opportunities to share information and intelligence on industry, company, crew, cargo, and personnel working in or moving through our ports. These efforts will help all stakeholders focus on the total port complex from a shared perspective, enhancing understanding of security issues and concerns, specific port vulnerabilities, and comprehensive requirements.

The "National Strategy for Maritime Security" states that "maritime security is best achieved by blending public and private maritime security activities…into a comprehensive, integrated effort that addresses all maritime threats." An April 2005 GAO report on maritime security (GAO-05-394) points out that sharing information among federal, state, and local agencies is central to effective prevention and response. Furthermore, including nonfederal stakeholders—such as local port authority operators, state officials, and representatives of private companies—makes it possible to identify and address security issues more

effectively and efficiently. Industry and businesses are on the frontlines of identifying and managing threats to their facilities.

Underlying all activities to prevent, protect, and respond to threats is an integrated common operating picture that accounts for every
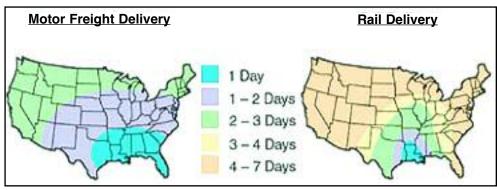

Figure 1: Estimated delivery times from the Gulf of Mexico.

movement, every vessel, every facility, and every mariner in the port environment. Decision makers need complete, accurate, and up-to-the-minute information to successfully perform their duties. A May 2005 GAO report (GAO-05-448T) identifies Maritime Domain Awareness as one of three steps in enhancing port security, along with reducing vulnerabilities of specific targets within seaports and improving the security of cargo flow through these ports.

Creating a common operating picture—a single, comprehensive "view" of all things to do with the security of our ports, waterways, and oceans—is fundamental to enhanced awareness. Ports represent a singularly complex aspect of Maritime Domain Awareness. Port communities bring together a wide variety of public and private stakeholders, each with their own particular view of the maritime domain and diverse ways of communicating with each other. To form a complete picture of what is happening in the port environment at any given moment, it is necessary to draw on the wealth of knowledge retained by the businesses and state and local governments that have an interest or jurisdiction in a particular port. In turn, this information forms part of a larger picture that includes all our navigable waterways and waters of interest.

Coping with Threats in the Maritime Domain
Today, dozens of potential threats could harm U.S. interests in the maritime domain. These threats range from illegal immigration by sea, and illegal fishing within our exclusive economic zone, to smuggling drugs, trafficking in humans, piracy, and terrorist attacks.

To thwart a potential terrorist attack, we must be aware of all that is coming into our ports, toward our coasts, and even our fisheries zone—as well as the final destination of anything coming in. As seen in Figure 1, a container unloaded at a port on the Gulf of Mexico on Monday can be across the country by Thursday.

Productive port partnerships and coordinated processes are absolutely critical to comprehensive situational awareness, risk and threat assessment, and collective intervention efforts. Creating a common operating picture can enhance all stakeholders' ability to identify unusual patterns or events, quickly respond to emerging threats, and coordinate an appropriate response to these threats.

Challenges to Achieving a
Common Operating Picture
As points of international trade, multijurisdictional oversight, labor, and industry, our ports offer countless challenges to achieving Maritime Domain Awareness. However, these same complexities offer equally varied options for obtaining crucial bits of information that, when added to other sources, provide the awareness and threat knowledge that is the basis for effective prevention measures. GAO-05-394 emphasizes that "the responsibility for protecting ports from a terrorist attack is a shared responsibility that crosses jurisdictional boundaries." Some of the federal agencies involved include the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Department of Justice.

Additionally, port authorities rely on a combination of port police, private security, and local law enforcement to maintain security, while private-sector stakeholders contribute to port security by identifying and addressing vulnerabilities around their own facilities that are near navigable waterways.

One of the key barriers to effective sharing of information cited by GAO-05-394 is a lack of personnel security clearances. Other barriers noted in the report included characteristics of specific ports, as well as cultural barriers between law enforcement and non-law enforcement officials.

All Stakeholders Can Contribute to a Common Operating Picture

Since 2001, a number of initiatives have been undertaken to increase information sharing among the various government and private-sector players involved. Among the most effective are the numerous area maritime security committees that have been established to facilitate sharing information among port security stakeholders. Since the Maritime Transportation Security Act was passed in 2002, the Coast Guard has created 43 area maritime security committees at ports around the nation. These committees serve as forums where federal agencies, state and local governments, law enforcement, and private industries come together to gain a full understanding of the security issues that are unique to their location. The committees share information on vulnerability assessments for their ports, potential threats or suspicious activities, and Coast Guard strategies to protect key infrastructure. They also assist the Coast Guard Captain of the Port in creating port security plans.

GAO-05-394 found that the newly established area maritime security committees have improved information sharing among port security stakeholders. Specific improvements include the timeliness, completeness, and usefulness of the information. Several interagency operational centers have also been established to share information on the intelligence and operational efforts of various participants. While the area maritime security committees focus more on interpersonal communication and information collection, the operation centers focus more on data gathered through technological means, such as sensors, radars, and cameras. These centers aim to improve awareness of incoming vessels, port facilities, and port operations. They can have command and control capabilities to communicate information to other vessels, aircraft, and vehicles that are part of port and security operations.

Regional organizations such as area maritime security committees, harbor safety committees, and waterway watch programs include representation from many different entities. These all serve as outstanding forums to discuss public policy problems, security and safety concerns, and potential courses of action. Strategic plans developed by such groups can be effective tools to focus resources and efforts to address problems. Regional leadership or work cultures that are focused on achieving collaboration can advance coordination by expanding collaborative efforts throughout a geographic area. In such cases, allowing regional organizations the flexibility to define their geographic areas or membership requirements can foster increased degrees of regional coordination. Stakeholders who agree upon common objectives, act together to achieve them, and build trusting relationships can enhance the process and facilitate continual progress.

Regional collaborative efforts can result in achieving mutual agreement among diverse stakeholders, expressed in comprehensive plans, on the prioritization of problems and on specific steps to be taken to address them. Moreover, the goals and objectives in plans allow problems and planned steps to be defined specifically, and progress to be more accurately measured.

At the heart of successful Maritime Domain Awareness is a culture of collaboration among federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector. Only when all stakeholders get involved and actively contribute to a common operating picture can decision makers be certain that they have all the information they need to make effective decisions, implement coordinated responses to threats in the maritime domain, and best secure our ports and waterways. The Coast Guard's district and sector commanders play a key role and can help stakeholders get involved to further such essential efforts.

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